



An Excerpt from
*Four Gatekeepers at the
Palace of Liberation*
By Swami Jyotirmayananda

Contentment—Santosh

In the great scripture of Yoga Vasistha, Sage Vasistha compares Liberation to a palace guarded by four gates, each defended by its own gatekeeper. To enter the palace—to attain Liberation—Sage Vasistha tells Rama he must befriend at least one of the four gatekeepers. In this section, Sage Vasistha describes the glories of the third gatekeeper at the palace of Liberation: *santosh*, or contentment.

The Glory of Contentment

“*Santoshat anuttam sukh-labhah*”—“When one experiences genuine contentment, one enjoys incomparable Bliss.” This statement is very significant. The happiness of one who enjoys *santosh* or contentment far surpasses that of an emperor. It is even higher than heavenly enjoyments because this state is independent of external attainments and acquisitions and leads to the highest goal—Liberation.

Santosh or contentment destroys cravings, feelings of humiliation, and impurities of the heart. If you are drinking the nectar of contentment, the world of the senses becomes insignificant. One enjoys rare inner peace and tranquility in a world that continues whipping a person with anxieties and desires like a harsh master.

You are in possession of an ethereal diamond, and therefore you will not chase after ordinary glass—ordinary objects and conditions of the world. If your mind is flowing towards the Self and you are savoring the joy of *Brahman*, your mind is no longer buffeted by external conditions and no longer degraded by the bitterness of miseries and afflictions. One who possesses a mind that has been established in the eternity of the Self is not dependent upon the world.

Think of the joy experienced by a traveler who has crossed over a burning desert when he discovers a wonderful, green forest stippled with sparkling streams. He lays down to rest under the cooling foliage of a tree with great delight. By the

same token, contentment allows one to taste the sweetness of the Divine Self and secretly receive endless refreshments from within.

Real Versus Sentimental Contentment

Contentment is not a sentimental state of mind. At times a person may say that they are content and have everything that they want—until someone flashes a lottery ticket in front of them. That is sentimental contentment.

Real contentment demands a change in the impressions of your unconscious, a change brought about by navigating the mind toward the Self. As long as the mind is not spontaneously directed towards the Self, it continues creating karmas, giving rise to adverse and sorrowful conditions.

The Folly of Comparing Yourself with Others

People are unceasingly comparing their happiness to the happiness of others, feeling that they are lacking something because they do not have the wealth or accomplishments possessed by another. When you compare yourself with others, your mind degrades what you do possess. You look down upon what God has given you, ever imagining that others have been given much more.

The majority of people ignore the fact that death can present itself at any moment, and they spend their precious time comparing imaginary advantages that one has over another. The Mahabharata gives a graphic description of this delusion. Many animals are lined up to be butchered, but they choose to ignore this obvious fact. Looking at the line in front of them, they console themselves with the idea that there is yet a long way to go. In the meantime, they are fighting over who is stronger, who is wiser, who is more popular, all the while suppressing the knowledge that they are steadily marching towards their death.

When you have a more profound insight, you realize that the world has been so fashioned that although one may have many benefits, there is

always a defect within that benefit that prevents it from being perfect. With philosophical insight, you learn that no one truly enjoys anything in this world. Nature does not care to fulfill all your desires in this plane of existence. Therefore, while Nature with one hand gives you great prosperity, with the other hand Nature twists the benefit so it is slightly distorted.

Nature has not bestowed an absolutely perfect situation upon anyone. If you can't see the defect in a particular case, it is only because you do not have all the information. Many people do not reveal before others the things that are gnawing at them. They always try to portray themselves as happy and prosperous. This brings about great illusion, with everyone thinking that others are so happy, and they are the only ones who are miserable.

Contentment Is a Dynamic Virtue

Working to develop contentment does not imply that you will become passive or lazy. Certainly you will continue to work hard to progress in all planes of life. However, your work will be performed with a calm mind, not one burdened with the illusion that you cannot be happy until you accomplish a given project. If you are content, you simply work with joy.

With spiritual contentment, you are free. If you succeed in a given project, wonderful. If you don't, then you have still succeeded in a far more important project—that of keeping the mind tranquil.

Learn to Watch Your Mind

To promote contentment, watch your mind under three conditions:

1. When a desire for an object or circumstance first asserts itself
2. When you acquire the desired object
3. When you lose it

What happens to your mind in these three situations? Ideally, the mind should not vary in its state of tranquility. It should remain balanced at all times. The majority of people have no understanding of

the benefits of a balanced mind. Day by day, they put their minds under excessive tension: desiring something with tremendous intensity; developing hatred towards anyone or anything that seems to be an obstacle in obtaining it; becoming agitated with elation once the object of desire is attained; struggling to maintain or hang on to what is attained; then, inevitably, grieving terribly when the object is lost, or they become disillusioned with it.

Most people allow the pendulum of their minds to swing in these directions. They know of no other way to live. Therefore, they cannot comprehend the serenity and joy that can be experienced with a calm and relaxed mind.

However, just as the dust in the atmosphere settles down when there is a shower of rain, similarly, all anxious desires of the mind settle down under the shower of contentment. A contented person is not agitated by *raga* and *dwesha* (attachment and hatred) or dominated by ego and its expectations.

Contentment Brightens the Intellect

If you are content, you have no stress. You enjoy inner peace. Your mind is not ruffled by the objects and conditions of life. No longer is the light of the intellect obstructed or refracted by the agitations of the mind.

The moment your mind becomes calm and relaxed, your intellect gains a unique brilliance. During even five minutes of your practice of meditation, your mind becomes relaxed, and certain powerful and amazing insights may arise. If the mind were to enjoy continuous tranquility, the light of intellect would continue to burn brightly. Therefore, there will be rootedness in God—an inward identity with the Absolute Self.

Discontent Obscures One's True Identity

Just as you cannot see your face reflected in a mirror that is covered with dust, similarly, you

cannot perceive your deeper Self with a discontented mind. Because it is confused, such a mind prevents you from knowing your true inner identity and always exaggerates things.

At one moment, the mind asserts its greatness and the ego soars. In the next moment, the mind laments, "I am the most unfortunate person! The whole world has been created just to hurt me." When you think so highly of yourself, that is one exaggeration, and when you think so lowly of yourself, that is another. A discontented mind does not allow you to have a profound understanding of your higher Self. Only in a state of contentment do you rise beyond your mind and realize, "I am *Brahman*, I am universal, I am the Absolute." A contented mind is like a clear mirror in which your spiritual face reflects without any distortion.

A Contented Mind Is the Greatest Wealth

If the mind of a person is genuinely content, then although he may be materially poor, he is richer than the greatest monarchs in this world. As you study this point objectively, you realize that for the majority of people becoming prosperous does not mean that they are going to be happy. If wealth is acquired by a person on the basis of goodness, as the Grace of Goddess Lakshmi, then a spiritually advanced person will make good use of that wealth for the betterment of all. However, if wealth has been obtained by hook or by crook or comes to a person without proper effort or spiritual readiness, then that wealth will probably lead to unhappiness.

Whatever little happiness a person had is going to be lost the moment he wins a sizable lottery. The moment that the person becomes too wealthy, he cannot enjoy a walk outdoors by himself. He needs a bodyguard. He cannot talk to his friends without wondering what they want from him. If such a person were later to enjoy real serenity, he would realize that all the wealth of the world is nothing compared to contentment.

Contentment Prevents Vitamin “P” Deficiency

People often entertain the illusion that certain objects are absolutely necessary for their happiness. For example, a person has a perfectly good car, but then he sees a neighbor’s car and becomes fascinated with it. He says to himself, unless I get that type of car, I am not going to be happy. The moment that idea enters his mind, his own car no longer gives him any happiness. Whenever he sees his neighbor’s car with all the latest advances, he becomes discontented.

One who does not have that type of expectation is able to enjoy whatever he has and is able to live in the present. The moment you have the expectation that gaining an object or circumstance will make you happier, you are living in the future.

Much in the same way, due to lack of contentment, people tend to live in the past. If there is frustration and you feel that you cannot fulfill your desires, then the mind plays another trick and returns to the past, thinking that once upon a time you were so happy, and everything was so wonderful. In reality, it was not as enjoyable as your memory now presents it to be. If God were to send you back to that time and place, you would be miserable.

Thus, the majority of people either turn to the past or the future but never enjoy the present. Therefore, they become deprived of a special nourishment of the soul. It is called Vitamin “P”: Vitamin Present. The mind must be nourished by the present. When there is contentment, your mind enjoys the present, and on the basis of the present, builds a future with a sense of fullness and expansion.

A Mind Sanctioned by God— Not the Ego

When the mind enjoys contentment, any idea that arises within that mind is sanctioned by God. A discontented mind is under the influence of the

ego. The ego’s desires and expectations—which are generally *rajasic* or *tamasic* (restless or dull) in nature—are not sanctioned by God.

When the mind has reached a high level of purity and tranquility, whatever desires arise in that mind are not based on the ego, but on the love of God. It is that type of desire, *sat kama*, true desire, that becomes the basis of the great deeds accomplished by Sages. All prosperities flow to a person who has developed that state of contentment.

From Darkness to Light

When the mind is not content, the defects of your personality become highlighted; but if the mind is highly content, the defects of your personality begin to fade. To understand this better, think of the moon in the night sky. When the moon is not full, you see dark shadows on the moon; but when there is a full moon, the dark shadows disappear. Certain limitations are always present within the human personality as long as one is bound by the world. But when the mind is content, there is a special ability to transcend those limitations. Inner fullness cascades over all your limitations.



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